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ABSTRACT

A southwestern university sponsored a two-week, half-day summer institute designed to help teachers become aware of recent writing research and implement writing within their classrooms based on the research findings. During the first week, teachers were encouraged to pay more attention to the communication perspective with less attention on evaluating the form of writing. The second week, instruction covered many topics relating to writing development at all grade levels. From a followup questionnaire, six teachers were selected for study over a period of time. Findings show that these teachers changed their approach to writing evaluation and implemented the ideas from the writing institute. Emerging trends show the differences in the amount of implementation, the satisfaction in using the new approach, the frustration at not being able to implement the approach enough, and the obstacles to implementation. Implications for teacher educators include the need to acknowledge the reality of the classroom, the varying personal styles of teachers, the differences in school settings, the guilt teacher educators create, the importance of continuous support for classroom teachers' efforts, and the time spent and effort exerted by good teachers. The resulting implications for teacher education are that teachers should learn about the need to provide opportunities to discover the power of children's learning, to understand the diverse expectations of others, to be aware of the influence of personal circumstances, and to learn the importance of professional growth and development. (EL)

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TEACHERS TEACH THEIR TEACHERS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH*

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TEACHERS TEACH THEIR TEACHERS:
IMPLICATIONS FOR FACILITATING PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Within recent years, there has been a tremendous amount of research concerning the acquisition of literacy (Bissex, 1980; Chomsky, 1971; Clay, 1979; Graves, 1982; Harste, Burke & Woodward, 1983; Holdaway, 1979; Taylor, 1983). This information suggests that there are teacher behaviors which facilitate the development of literacy. What happens to teachers as they attempt to implement the findings of this recent literacy research within their classrooms? More specifically:

- What change occurs, if any, in teachers' attitudes and beliefs about writing instruction during a university course on the teaching of writing?
- If there is a change, is this change actually reflected in classroom teaching behaviors?
- Are there certain variables which facilitate or inhibit this change?
- What is the nature of change over a period of time?
- Are there some specific implications for teacher educators in their teaching of teachers?

It is only within the very recent past that questions about the effect of university classroom instruction in the

area of writing (and the language arts) are being addressed (Baugham, 1984; Caulkins & Curtis, 1983; Chism, Gray, Kienzle, Kimpf, McClure & Yocum, 1984). Previously, the literature regarding classroom teaching practices has generally focused upon such related issues as states of teacher development and their relationship to teaching behaviors (Fuller, 1969; Hall & Loucks, 1978; Katz, 1972), and the influence of basal reading series and curricular guidelines upon instructional decisions (Bawden et al., 1979; Duffy, 1981; Shannon, 1982).

At times, teacher magazines and journals present information about teachers and the implementation of literacy research in their classrooms. Frequently, the tone of these articles subtly implies that this implementation is done easily and quickly. Is this the way it is with most teachers in the "real world"? Or, are there issues that are not often acknowledged because of the potential discomfort they create for some teachers, and, in particular, teacher educators and researchers?

This article focuses upon the findings of a longitudinal study concerning six teachers as they attempted to implement recent literacy research in the area of writing instruction. These findings pose some definite implications for teacher education, and more specifically, teacher education in the language arts.

Description of the Study

A southwestern university sponsored a two week, half-day, summer institute which was designed to help teachers 1) become aware of recent writing research and 2) implement writing within their classrooms based upon the research findings. A noted authority in the area of literacy development conducted the first week of the seminar. Then, one of the researchers extended and complemented the first week's experiences during the following week.

The noted authority spent the week discussing written language growth and development from a more naturalistic perspective. He emphasized the need for teachers to encourage writing in their classrooms from a communication perspective with less attention upon evaluating the form of writing. Hundreds of examples of children's writing were displayed and discussed. These samples demonstrated that the child is the informant in the writing process. They also provided the opportunity for the teachers to discover the fascination of looking at children's writing from a developmental perspective.

The second week provided a workshop atmosphere where reading consultants, teachers, and the university

instructor offering many topics relating to writing development at all grade levels. Various experiences included: whole language strategies for kindergarten through college students, sentence combining in writing, videotapes of classrooms integrating writing, sharing sessions with teachers, techniques for evaluating writing, suggestions for publishing books, holistic scoring, and writing development for children ages 3 through 6. The students were asked to complete a project and an annotated bibliography of readings that had meaning for them.

On the first day of the institute, the teachers were asked to make some decisions about a sample of a child's writing. The teachers were asked to list the strengths of the child's writing and then list suggestions for improvement. The last day of the institute the teachers were again asked to make decisions about another child's writing sample. This time, they were asked to create categories of evaluation and then rank order them.

In the following October, a questionnaire was sent to the teachers to see how they were coming along in implementing ideas presented in the institute. From this data, six teachers were selected for the purposes of observation and interviewing over a period of time. It was hoped that this procedure would provide information

which would be helpful for teacher educators in conducting future institutes and university courses.

Findings

From the beginning to the end of the institute, the teachers did change in their approach to evaluating children's writing. At the beginning, there was much attention to form aspects of writing. At the end, there was a tremendous shift to the meaning or process of writing. For example, one teacher after analyzing the first sample indicated that the child needed help with "punctuation, handwriting, spacing, and spelling." By the end of the workshop she had decided to let her children "write as much as possible" and rated "ideas and communication" as the first criterion by which to evaluate a child's writing. Would this shift be carried over into the teachers' classrooms?

The teachers' response (71% return) to the October questionnaire indicated that they were implementing ideas from the Writing Institute. In general, the questionnaire suggested that 1) the Writing Institute was helpful, 2) that more writing was occurring in their classrooms. and 3) at times and in particular situations, implementation was difficult due to the conflicting beliefs of other teachers, supervisors and parents. The six teachers

chosen for the study were observed in their classrooms and interviewed at the end of the following two school years. Four trends emerged from the analysis of this data: quality, attitude, frustration, and obstacles.

Quality

In all six classrooms, the children were writing in ways that were congruent with the Writing Institute. However, there was a difference in quality. Three teachers were integrating writing and reading throughout their programs. This group was called "high implementers." In contrast, the three moderate implementers were including discrete activities during parts of the day: books, dictations, mailboxes and so on.

Attitude

All the teachers experienced some satisfaction in moving toward a more developmental approach toward writing instruction. One teacher, commenting on changes since the October questionnaire said:

I think it's more valuable if anything. If anything, I believe in it more strongly than I did in October, because I've seen it work with the children. (high implementer)

Another, a moderate implementer reported:

I didn't really set any goals other than that I wanted the children to participate. 'Cause I didn't know what to expect, really. I listened to what was said in the Institute and I felt, "Well, yeah, that's neat. I wonder how much of it would really come out?" I guess my objective this year has been to see if indeed they did produce. And they do. So yes, I have seen my objectives reached.

A high implementer stated:

It's really fascinating to watch. One day the child will misspell everything. But you can read it all. You know that they knew what they wanted to say. They wrote it out. They aren't afraid to write it. And then later on in the year, the same exact words that I can remember 'em misspelling, they'll spell it correctly. And it's all on their own, because I haven't done it. It's just somewhere they'll pick it up...but I've learned quite a bit out of just realizing that a child's mind is going to lead him down the right road.

Frustration

All the teachers expressed some frustration, disappointment and guilt at not implementing what they felt they should. Comments from two of the moderate implementers included:

I know I'm still not where I should be or where I want to be and I find it's really hard to break the old habits.

I can just think of miles and miles of things I need to do. First of all we don't write every day. And that's a goal that I set out for myself. I think they will be more fluent writers had we practiced, if we had lived up to this writing every day. I'm not happy with where they are.

And, even the high implementers made similar types of statements:

Well, our class library we have written for. But what I'd like for us to write something for, is to take something into the big library so it would be filed in the library. But we've never gotten that far.

I wish I were using my mailboxes more. The kids look in there to see notes. And I don't put notes back in them regularly. And that's my fault. That's my goal for next year--to do something with my mailboxes.

Obstacles

All of the teachers ran into obstacles to implementation. Three categories seemed to emerge from an analysis of their interviews. These three categories included time pressures, discordant expectations of significant others within the school context, and personal circumstances.

Time Pressures

Time Pressures came from the ratio of students per teacher, the difficulty of managing the whole class while giving individual help, and the imposed curricular requirements from the school district and state. Comments from moderate implementers included:

Last year I averaged 17 to 20 and this year I'm averaging 23. Some days as many as 25. And because this group is more difficult behavior wise, I have

to do a lot more management kinds of things...I'm limited by space. All my learning games have to be put away because of the afterschool class...I have to say, "I don't have enough time to write long stories, you know; maybe we can get back to that." With this many children, you know, you never get back to (it).

It has to do with pressures I feel, although they may not be real. Pressures to complete books, workbooks, we've been given. Although no one here in our building says you must accomplish this book and that book...I still feel a pressure to do that. And our day, it's not very long.

High implementers also expressed frustration about time pressures:

Well, it's just a plain lot of work to do all the things they were talking about...Well, it's just that there's so many things to be done. We're self-contained. So I've got 23 kids that I feel like I need to reach every day. And it's hard to sit down with every single child aside from your reading groups, math lesson, lunch and everything else. You just have 6 hours of school altogether. It's just the same old story. Just not enough time and energy. Because you do get tired. The daily grind is just--it is very wearing.

Discordant Expectations of Others Within the School Environment

The second obstacle to implementation was the clash of expectations between the teachers and the significant others within the school environment. These "significant others" included other teachers, parents, supervisory and administrative personnel, and the children. Comments from one teacher about younger children's expectations included:

They do (inventive spelling) but they don't like it. These children know there is a correct way to spell words and they're really not happy. Maybe they've passed beyond exploratory writing. It should have happened 3, 4, going into 5, not 5, 6, 7. (moderate implementer)

And for older children, a reluctance even a refusal to edit persisted. With the last word written, these children expected to be done. One teacher found this very discouraging.

I need to do a better job about conferencing. If I could just get over the rejection I feel. You remember Larry (in last year's interview with the children)? He said, "Yeah, she makes us go over it." You know, if I could just get away from where it was a detriment to always go over things. If I could just find something that would take away that feeling, then I would feel a lot more success. (moderate implementer)

Then, there were parental objections. One teacher reported that parents had not liked the books the children made. Another was pressured from posting children's work with invented spellings because parents expected to see corrected spelling.

In addition, several teachers expressed conflict with the belief systems of supervisors, administrators, and other teachers. For instance, a moderate implementer explained:

I feel pressure from the district as a whole because I feel a certain responsibility to these children in terms of what they're going to have to do next year.

If they don't happen to be in a classroom where the teacher can recognize where they are without my saying they've gone through this particular book in the basal...I don't know how real the pressure is, I feel it, but I think it's kind of a traditional thing with me and with most of us in the teaching profession...But yet...I don't get any pressure from our principal, or actually from the reading coordinator, from anybody that says, "You have to do this, this, and this." I guess I feel it more from other teachers. It's the lounge talk. That sort of thing.

Even a high implementer reported:

But I know some of the teachers in this school don't really think what I'm doing is right. Because they feel like the children ought to stay in the basal. But I just keep it quiet and do what I want to do. They've said to me that, you know, you need to follow the basal.

Personal Circumstances

Finally, there were personal circumstances such as illness, family crises, and individual school problems that presented obstacles to implementation. One teacher found that things just fell apart after an illness. She said:

I had a field trip planned to the Post Office. And we learned to write letters and our addresses. And that went real well, except I had dental surgery in there and we never got around to letter writing, to get the letters written to mail. In fact, I still have the kids' stamps. They all brought a stamp so we could all write letters. But I never got it off the ground. (moderate implementer)

Several teachers felt that they "needed structure" and that the basals supplied that structure as well as saving time. Other teachers, both high and moderate expressed

residual doubts about the program and a desire for a support group:

Well, we were encouraged to be more accepting of children's writing and I agreed with that totally. But I'd like to have some reassurance that that's good. But I'd really like to hear from people who are in the classroom right now. This is what works. And this is how it works for me. (moderate implementer)

Maybe more follow-up later on...even 6 months later, or a year later. Just coming back and discussing it, and reinforcing it with other people and finding out what they're doing. (high implementer)

In general, the interviews and classroom observations documented that all the teachers were including more writing in their classrooms and were increasing their appreciation for children's writing development. All experienced some obstacles to their desired implementation. What seemed to differentiate the high and moderate implementers was an internalization of the theory. This internalization of theory gave the high implementers the confidence to trust the children to learn, to explain their own programs to parents and supervisors and to adjust the imposed curriculum to accomplish their own goals.

Acknowledgements and Implications

Based upon this two-year study of the six teachers, it would seem that there are some acknowledgements which teacher educators need to make. An increased awareness of

the "real world" should help teacher educators to better provide more effective preservice and inservice experiences.

1. Teacher educators need to acknowledge the reality of classrooms.

The researchers were "struck" by the demands upon the classroom teacher. These demands include: time, space, number of children, curricular expectations, state requirements, pressures from parents, children, and administrators. All of the researchers had been classroom teachers themselves for a number of years. Yet, it was obvious that the six teachers in this particular study and from six different school districts did not enjoy the autonomy that the researchers did when they were in public school classrooms. Nevertheless, it was amazing what the six teachers were able to accomplish in spite of all of these pressures.

It would seem that teacher educators need to participate more extensively in the public school classroom. Checking in on student teachers or field experience students does not provide the opportunity to really appreciate the daily life of the classroom teacher. Teacher educators need to become part of the ongoing

school environment. Perhaps, they need to return to the classroom and teach for periods of time. Gaining a more complete understanding of the life of the classroom teacher would hopefully facilitate more of a "match" between what the classroom teacher can accomplish and what teacher educators often imply should and can be accomplished. The question needs to be asked: Do teacher educators impede classroom teachers from changing or trying new ideas by implying that (1) it can be done "overnight" and (2) that teachers are failures if you do not teach in a certain way?

2. Acknowledge that teachers are different--they have varying personal styles.

The teachers in this study were all very different. Some of the teachers seemed to have a greater need for well defined structure. This seemed to be generally true of the moderate implementers. This may suggest that teachers have varying rates of internalization. These varying rates of internalization could be due to personal style, personal circumstances as well as the school climate. It should be noted that some of the moderate implementers are continuing to work at internalization of theory. One of the moderate implementers went to a major

university to study with a well known authority in writing the second summer after the Writing Institute. So, just as teacher educators talk about children's varying learning styles and rates of development, these same viewpoints need to be acknowledged about teachers.

Perhaps workshops, institutes, and teacher education classes need to adjust and consider the individual differences of the participants. It would seem that teachers have varying rates of internalization and that this can occur throughout their teaching career. Factors such as personal stress and personal style as well as individual school climates can affect the degree of opportunity for internalization.

3. Teacher educators need to acknowledge that there are many realities in school settings.

All six teachers were in six different school districts. These settings were different, the social contexts varied, the children, teachers, and administrators varied. Teacher educators may not prepare students to deal with these many realities.

It might be advantageous at the preservice level to have students involved in diverse field experiences. In addition, teacher educators in inservice and graduate

courses need to acknowledge the diversity of settings. Teacher educators also need to know the setting of the school in which they are doing inservice.

4. Teacher educators need to acknowledge that they create guilt.

All of the six teachers responded with guilt when questioned during the interviews. It would seem that the teacher educator's presence reminded them that they were not doing all the things that had been suggested in the Writing Institute. Do teacher educators often imply that change or new ideas can be done quickly and easily? Do teachers, then, if they do not meet with immediate success, feel that there is something wrong with them or that the idea won't work? There is the ideal and real in everyone's life, even teacher educators'. It should be noted that this guilt also seemed to be a positive factor in that it motivated teachers to evaluate, to reformulate goals, and to try to change.

Perhaps teacher educators need to state that change takes time, and that teachers need to keep trying new ideas. In addition, teacher educators need to help teachers view guilt as a possible positive force in change.

5. Teacher educators need to acknowledge the importance of continuous support for classroom teachers' approximations.

Teacher educators encourage preserve and inservice teachers to accept children's approximations. Teacher educators need to acknowledge classroom teachers' approximations and provide encouragement. One teacher who took other graduate courses after the Writing Institute with one of the researchers commented upon the support and encouragement she had continued to receive. Having students in more than one course or providing support groups may be important.

It would seem that teacher educators need to be understanding and supportive as teachers try to change. This recommendation could be extended to those in administrative and supervisory positions within the school setting.

6. Good teaching takes a Ton of Energy.

Teacher educators need to acknowledge the time and effort exerted by good teachers. This needs to be stated in coursework as well as inservice. Teacher educators either forget about the time and effort of good teaching

or they fail to acknowledge it.

Given the nature of these acknowledgements, it would appear that there are some implications for teacher education.

1. Provide opportunities for the discovery of the power of children's learning (internalization of the theory of the child as informant).

The high implementers did this within their classrooms. Are their techniques to help teachers and preservice students discover the power of children's learning? Would field experiences where teacher education students have the opportunity to see and help children write for a purpose facilitate this internalization?

2. Help teachers appreciate and understand the diverse expectations of others.

Teachers and teacher education students need to be helped to understand the diverse backgrounds of the total school population, other teachers, parents, administrators, children and the school community itself. Fellow teachers come from different information bases. They may not have had a graduate course recently. Their belief system may have been influenced by the theory of a particular basal

program, commercially packaged materials, or a consultant. Parents may not be aware of new information. Teachers need to know how to help others "understand" in a professional way. They need to be aware that children's attitudes about learning are formed from a variety of sources including parents and the teacher from the year before. There are also community expectations which vary from one area to another. One community places a great deal of expectation upon children to perform well (correct and perfect). Another community places little value upon writing. While a third community has many parents who are employed in the high tech industries with many homes containing computers and word processors.

3. Help teachers become aware of personal circumstances.

For all the teachers personal circumstance influenced what happened in their classroom. There was the stress of personal or family illness. There were the classroom constraints of space, time and number of children and personalities of children. Professional goals such as taking two graduate courses during the same semester is time consuming. As one teacher said recently, "Attending class two nights a week takes time from my doing the things

I would like to do in my classroom."

4. Help teachers understand professional growth and development.

Both preservice and inservice teachers need to understand their role as a decision maker. There are things which teachers can change and there are those which they cannot change.

Teachers need to understand that there are developmental stages in becoming a teacher. The literature suggests that many first year teachers are preoccupied with self (Fuller, 1969; Katz, 1972). Then as they gain experience over the first few years, they begin to focus upon the children. The high implementers in this study eventually focused upon the children. In doing this there seemed to be much thinking, "mucking" about, turmoil and finally trying and changing. In this process they saw the power of the child as learner and became secure in their own belief system. However, years of experience in the classroom did not necessarily appear to be a prerequisite for being a high implementer. One of the high implementers was a first and second year teacher.

Teachers need to know how to develop support systems. The high implementers had varying support systems. University persons can help provide this support by sharing information with administrators and supervisors. They can write supportive letters about teachers and their teaching to persons in school power positions. Teacher educators can help teachers develop such ideas regarding support systems including: sharing phone numbers, forming whole language groups, belonging to professional organizations, attending their meetings, and reading professional journals. Teacher educators need to help preservice and inservice students share information with administrators and parents. Parents and administrators of the high implementers generally are now supportive. One principal even made a presentation to the school board on invented spelling!

Teacher educators need to help teachers better understand the nature of the risk taking process.

Questions which must be attended to include:

- If you decide to change, how are significant others around you going to react?
- Do they come from your information base?
- How should you interpret their reactions?
- How will you respond to these reactions?

Are there suggestions or guidelines which could be helpful to teachers regarding the nature of the risk taking process?

This study has provided the four researchers with some insights and implications about their role as teacher educators. It has provided a number of ideas about how teacher educators can better prepare teachers to make choices, choices which support the knowledge about the development of literacy in children.

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